

לא באתי אלא לעזור

Medicine Guidelines

By Rabbi Eli Gersten

If someone is a choleh she'yaish bo sakana (potentially life threatening illness) then they are permitted to take any medication. However, a choleh sh'ain bo sakana (non-life threatening illness) or one who suffers from a meichush (irritation) are limited in terms of what they are permitted to ingest. Each medicine will need to be investigated as to whether it is *raui l'achila*, whether *achshivei* applies, whether the potentially non-kosher ingredients are *batel*, and if not whether there is a halachically permissible way to take the medicine.

There are 3 basic groupings of oral medications; pills, liquids and chewables. Each will be discussed in its own section.

Pills

Sheretz saruf

Shulchan Aruch (84:17) says that for *refuah* purposes one may consume a *sheretz saruf* (any non-kosher item that was burned up). The Rema in *Hilchos Refuah* (Y.D. 155:3) brings this as well. Once an item is burned to the point where it no longer *raui l'achilas Adam*, it loses its *sheim ochel*. The Rambam *Hilchos Machalos Assuros* 14:11 writes אכל אוכל האסור אחר שהסריה וזהבאיש ובטל מאוכל אדם הרי זה פטור. Though the term "*patur*" implies that there remains an *issur d'rabannan*, *Achronim* disagree as to which *issur* this is referring. *Minchas Kohen* (*Shar Ha'taruvos* 1:9) understood this to be an *issur d'rabbanan* of *neveila*, which would mean that only a true *choleh* could eat a *neveila serucha*. However, *Pri Chadash* (103:1) understood that the Rambam was referring to the *issur* of *ba'al tishaktzu*. Furthermore, *Pri Chadash* (81:3) writes that *ba'al tishaktzu* does not apply to an item taken for the purpose of *refuah*, or any other legitimate reason. Many *Poskim* follow this lenient ruling.

Because pills are made to be swallowed no effort is made to improve their taste (aside from the coatings which will be dealt with later). Although there are potentially non-kosher ingredients in the pill, such as *stearates* (e.g. stearic acid, magnesium stearate, calcium stearate or zinc stearate), *emulsifiers* or *gelatins* which by themselves are not *nifsal*, still *Chazon Ish* (O.C. 116:8) writes that if the ingredients in the pill are combined in such a way that it is impossible for them to be removed, then the pill is viewed as one entity¹. Since the overall taste of the pill is bitter and unpleasant, the pill is considered to be *nifsal mei'achila*. This is seemingly the opinion of *Igros Moshe* (O.C. II:92) as well.

Achshivei

The *Rosh* (*Pesachim* II:1) says that one may not eat charred *chametz*, even if it was destroyed before *Pesach*. Although it is *nifsal mei'achila*, and *mid'oreisa* we would say about one who would intend to eat this, "בטלה דעתו אצל כל אדם", nevertheless it is *assur mid'rabbanan* for one to consume the burnt *chametz*, and thereby demonstrate that for him it was not *nifsal mei'achila*. This is known as the principle of *achshivei*. The *Yad Avrohom* (Y.D. 155:3) explains that *achshivei* does not apply to items taken for *refuah*, since it is clear that these items are taken as a result of the *choli* and not because they are *machshiv* them as foods². For this reason one is

permitted to consume a sheretz saruf, provided it is taken purely for medicinal reasons. However, Rema qualifies the heter to consume a sheretz saruf with the following two conditions.

- The remedy must be a refuah yeduah (a proven remedy) or al pi mumcha (prescription).
- If an equivalent kosher pill is available, an effort must be made to use the kosher pill³.

What is considered refuah (medicines vs. vitamins)?

Do all medical conditions remove the issue of *achshivei*? Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (Igros Moshe O.C. II:92) explains that the reason why *achshivei* does not apply to medicines is because people would be willing to chew and consume even bitter and unpleasant items in order to alleviate their illness. It would appear from this explanation that the litmus test for determining whether one is permitted to take a medicine that is nifsal is whether the condition is severe enough that one would be willing to subject themselves to eating offensive foods. If most people would be unwilling to eat bitter or unpleasant foods to cure this type of condition then this condition would not permit swallowing pills that contain issur. It is therefore questionable whether vitamin pills can be taken in all situations, even when the vitamin pills are only taken proactively. Can we clearly say in this situation that an average person would be willing to eat foul tasting foods? Rav Belsky says that Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt'l likened multivitamin pills to a food supplement. Just as vegetables and herbs eaten to maintain ones nutrition must be kosher, so too vitamin pills must have a hashgacha. If vitamins are taken for medicinal purposes (not just as a food supplement) then they would be classified as any other medicine pill and be permitted. However, Rav Schachter feels that even multivitamins are clearly taken for medical purposes and therefore do not violate the principle of *achshivei*.

Coatings

Even when a medication is nifsal mei'achila, there is a secondary issue regarding the coating. For example, even if a medicine might pose no concern, the gelatin capsule itself can be problematic. There are two basic types of capsules; hard capsules and soft gelcaps.

Hard capsules



Although hard capsules can be made from bovine (cow) bone, porcine (pig) bone or pigskin gelatin or any combination thereof, the preferred material for hard capsules is bovine bone gelatin⁴, because they produce the highest bloom and viscosity. Although, the minhag is to consider bovine bone gelatin as treif, this is primarily because of *achshivei*. Therefore Rav Belsky holds that a choleh, for whom medications do not violate *achshivei*, may be lenient to take pills that are encased in a hard capsule, if tablets are not available. Rav Schachter holds that even vitamins in hard capsules are permitted, if alternatives are not available.

Soft capsules



Soft gelcaps can be made from bovine or porcine bone gelatin as well as from pigskin gelatin or any combination thereof⁵. Because soft-gels require much lower bloom,

porcine hide gelatin is not uncommon. Pigskins are considered edible and have the status of ba'sar⁶ (issur d'oriya). Although the hides are soaked in acid, the acid is later neutralized, and the issur is chozer v'niyur (See Chavas Daas 103:1). Therefore, because there is a real possibility that soft gelcaps might be made from pigskin, they are not recommended. Additionally, soft gelcaps are made with plasticizers such as glycerin. The ratio of glycerin to gelatin can be 1:2 or even greater. In cases of strong need the pills should be wrapped in tissue paper and swallowed, since this is considered shelo k'derech achilaso.

Film-coated tablets



Many tablets are covered in a thin plastic material (polymer). These coatings are so thin that they do not obscure the letters embossed in the tablet. The polymers are not a concern; however, the plasticizers (acetylated monoglyceride or triacetin) which are added to produce flexibility and elasticity in the coating are sensitive ingredients. The ratio of plasticizer to polymer in a typical film-coating formulation is about 20%. Nevertheless, there is room to be lenient since the possible issurim in question are absorbed into the polymer, and the polymer is not a food. Rav Belsky says in the name of Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky zt'l that the halachos of ta'am k'ikar don't apply to inedibles. If issur becomes absorbed into an inedible item, such as a plastic, the issur becomes batel b'rov. Since the polymers are five times more than the plasticizers that they absorb, the plasticizers are batel b'rov.

Enteric coatings

Enteric coatings prevent the tablet from dissolving until it reaches the intestines. Because they are coatings, they are on the surface of the pill, and are not batel with the other ingredients. However, most coatings are polymers and have no kashrus issue. Although there is one particular enteric coating which is made from sodium alginate and stearic acid, the stearic acid in this coating is typically .5%-1%. Therefore enteric coatings do not present a problem.

Sugar coatings



Some pills are sugar coated to facilitate ease of swallowing. Though the sugar itself is not problematic, gelatin can be used as a binder to help the sugar adhere to the pill. When taking sugar coated pills, one must check the ingredients to make sure that gelatin is not listed. Other potentially problematic ingredients that can be added to a tablet coatings are (di)acetylated monoglyceride, triacetin and polysorbates. In cases of strong need a choleh may wrap these pills in tissue paper and swallow, since this is considered shelo k'derech achilaso.

Liquid medicines

Liquid medicines are not regarded as being nifsal mei'achila. They often contain ingredients such as glycerin and emulsifiers (polysorbates) which are kashrus sensitive. Therefore, it is recommended that one purchase liquid medicines with hashgacha. Triaminic makes a full line of cough medicines and fever reducers (acetaminophen). They are widely available and are OU certified. Note: Triaminic infant drops are not certified.

Liquid Ibuprofen

Liquid ibuprofen is not available at this time with hashgacha. Moreover, it is known that a leading brand of liquid ibuprofen currently uses animal glycerin. If a young child is running a very high fever, they may be considered in the category of a choleh she'yaish bo sakana and liquid ibuprofen may be given. It would be preferable to use a generic ibuprofen, whose glycerin is still in the realm of safek. If the child (or adult) is definitely not in the category of a choleh she'yaish bo sakana, but they have a strong need to take a liquid ibuprofen, the following method can be employed. Liquid ibuprofen contains approximately .6 grams of glycerin per 5 ml (1 teaspoon) serving, or about 12%. If one were to dilute a teaspoon of this medicine into 1 1/3 ounces of water or juice, the glycerin content would become batel b'shishim. Although ordinarily one is not permitted to be mivatel issur (ain mivatlin issur lichatchila), a choleh is considered a situation of bidieved⁷. Although ordinarily we would view the entire medicine as being issur (i.e. chaticha nasseh neveilah) for the sake of a choleh one can be maikel. This is because Rema paskens that b'hefsed mirubah we do not say Chanan lach b'lach b'shar issurim and a choleh is considered like a makom of hefsed mirubah⁸. This rationale should only be applied to medicines (such as ibuprofen) where the issur is not the active ingredient. In cough syrups where the issur (i.e. glycerin) has medicinal value, it is questionable whether one can be mivatel the glycerin even for the sake of a choleh⁹. Also, there is a very high proportion of glycerin in some cough syrups which makes being mivatel the glycerin not practical. Therefore, one should make sure to only purchase cough medicines with a hechsher.

Flavors

Even if a liquid medicine does not contain glycerin it is still not recommended because it contains unknown flavors. If no kosher equivalent is available and there is a strong need to take this medicine, one can be lenient. The avida l'taama component of medicine flavors is rarely non-kosher. Although the flavor may contain non-kosher carriers these would most likely be batel b'shishim in the medicine. Chanan would not be a concern as noted above.

Infant drops (acetaminophen/ibuprofen)

Adwe Brand sells acetaminophen infant drops. Other than that I am unaware of any other certified product on the market. If kosher drops are not available, then if possible one should be mivatel the glycerin. Acetaminophen drops should be diluted with 5 parts water or juice. Ibuprofen drops should be diluted with 8 parts water or juice. If bitul is not possible, and one can ascertain from the company that they are not using animal glycerin then one can be lenient based on safek chatzi shiyur bita'aruvos she'aino chazi l'itztarufei¹⁰. Additionally, Rav Schachter questions whether there is any issur to give medicines to infants, if this is necessary for their development (היינו רביתיה) and there is no alternative.

Alternatives to liquid

For a child who cannot swallow a pill, a pill crusher can be used to powder the medicine, which can then be mixed into applesauce and the like, obviating the need to take an uncertified liquid medicine. Check with pharmacist to make sure that this is acceptable

Chewables

Chewable tablets are not nifsal mei'achila. Therefore, it is important to know exactly what is in the chewable tablet. All pills contain excipients (inert substances) that can act as lubricants

binders and fillers. (My information in the following paragraphs comes primarily from a conversation I had with a world expert pharmaceutical lecturer.)

Lubricants

Lubricants allow the tablets to release from the tablet press. There are about 25 lubricants that are approved for use in pharmaceuticals such as stearic acid, magnesium stearate, calcium stearate and zinc stearate and many of them can be from animal or vegetable origin. The good news is that the industry trend is away from animal stearates and pharmaceutical companies more commonly using vegetable stearates. In general lubricants are added in proportions of .5%-1% w/w and in the overwhelming majority of cases (more than 90%) the amount of lubricant is less than 1.5%. Lubricants are never used above 2%. So generally we can assume that the lubricant is batel.

Binders and fillers

Sometimes tablets will list magnesium stearate (or a different lubricant) and stearic acid. In this case the magnesium stearate is acting as a lubricant and stearic acid is acting as a binder. In this capacity, stearic acid can be used in the range of 3-4%. While at first this would appear to be a major concern, however, Rav Belsky and others point out that stearic acid has no (or almost no) discernable taste. There is a machlokes haPoskim as to what level of bitul is required for tasteless issurim that are dissolved into a food. Shach (Y.D. 103:2) asserts that even a tasteless item requires bitul b'shishim. However, Pri Chadash and others disagree. Igros Moshe (Y.D. II:24) explains that Shach only requires shishim as a gezeira d'rabbanan, in cases where it is min b'mino, such as gid ha'nashe that dissolves into meat. If a tasteless item dissolves into aino mino then even Shach would agree that it is batel b'rov. If such a chewable tablet would need to be taken, it would be advisable to ascertain if the company uses only vegetable stearic acid or it can be wrapped in tissue paper and swallowed.

Lactose is also used in pills as a binder and filler and this would make the chewable tablet dairy. However, Aruch Hashulchan (Y.D. 89:7) says that for refuah one need wait only 1 hour between meat and milk, provided they rinse out their mouth.

Polysorbates (tweens) can also be used in a pill as a disintegrant, however they are likely batel b'shishim.

Gelatin can also be used as a binder in pills. If the pill contains gelatin and there is a strong need to take this pill, it should be wrapped in tissue paper and swallowed, since this is considered shelo k'derech achilaso.

Summary:

- Pills/tablets are considered nifsal and may be taken for refuah provided they are a refuah yeduah and there is no kosher alternative.
- There is a disagreement between Rav Belsky and Rav Schachter as to whether one may take vitamin pills as a nutritional supplement.
- A choleh may take hard capsules if a tablet form of the medicine is not available. Rav Schachter permits even vitamin capsules, if alternatives are not available.
- A choleh should not take soft gel caps. If there is a strong need, they should be wrapped in tissue paper and swallowed.
- Enteric coatings are not an issue

- Sugar coatings can contain gelatin binders and (di)acetylated monoglyceride or triacetin plasticizers,. check ingredients.
- Liquid medicines that contain glycerin require certification.
- In case of pressing need, such as ibuprofen for children with high fever, one can dilute the glycerin provided the glycerin is not an active ingredient, but one must ascertain how much glycerin is in the medicine.
- One should not take medicines that contain uncertified flavors. B'tzorech gadol one can be maikel
- Infant medicines – if company claims to use only vegetable ingredients, one can be lenient, if there is no other option.
- Chewable tablets should be avoided
- In cases of need magnesium stearate is assumed to be batel
- Stearic acid can be used as a binding agent and may not be batel b'shishim. In cases of great need. if the company claims that it only uses vegetable, one can be lenient, since stearic acid has no ta'am
- Check ingredients for gelatin, polysorbates and lactose in chewable tablets

1. וז"ל - טבלאות רפואה שמעורב בהן קמח ... אם הן מעורבין בדברים שאינן ראויין לאכילת אדם אין בהן משום חמץ . כדין נפסל מאכילת אדם, כיון דאי אפשר להפריד הקמח וגם אינו ראוי לחמע בו ומותר לבולען בפסח לרפואה,
2. Shagas Aryeh (75) disagrees and holds that we say achshivei even by items taken for refuah. However, Chazon Ish (או"ח סימן קטז אות ה ד"ה טבלאות) says that if the issur is not the active ingredient, which is often the case, then there would be no question of achshivei דלא שייך כאן אהשבי' דדעתו על הסמים
3. Rav Belsky explained that although the sheretz saruf is nifsal mei'achila and is taken for refuah, still as a *harchaka* to eating issur, it is only permitted when it is a refuah yeduah and there is no kosher alternative.
4. http://www.rubin.no/files/documents/markedsrapport_gelatin.pdf

Hard capsules

Bovine bone gelatin is preferred in this application as a high bloom and viscosity is required. In the past, bovine bone was used almost exclusively but today bovine hide and porcine gelatin are also used. Pigbone grades of gelatin are also available.

5. http://www.rubin.no/files/documents/markedsrapport_gelatin.pdf

Soft capsules

At one time beef bone gelatin accounted for almost all gelatin used in this application but currently accounts for about 65%. Pig bone, beef hide, pigskin and fish gelatin account for the balance.

See also Formulation and physical properties of soft capsules *Gabriele Reich Chapter 11 (Table 11.1):* Article is available at [http://www.usp.org/pdf/EN/USPNF/PF35\(4\)_StimArticle-2.pdf](http://www.usp.org/pdf/EN/USPNF/PF35(4)_StimArticle-2.pdf)

6. מסכת חולין פרק ט' משנה ב' - אלו שעורותיהן כבשרן עור האדם ועור חזיר
7. See Teshuvos B'tzail Hachachma V:39
8. Teshuvos Melamed L'ho'il O.C. 83 - וא"כ לחולה שאין בו סכנה ודאי הוי כהפ"מ - And Shevus Yaakov I:62 - שהוא לרפואה -
9. The Ravad holds that there is an issur D'oraisah to be mivatel issur in order to benefit from that issur. Since the glycerin in cough medicines serves a therapeutic purpose, one should not rely on being mivatel the glycerin.
10. Har Tzvi Y.D. 97, also see Pri Migadim (חלק א' פ"ד) בשם המנחת כהן (פ"ב ב"ב בשם המנחת כהן)

Uncoated, film coated or enteric coated medicine pills	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Nifsal mei'achila	We do not say achshivei	Permitted
Uncoated, film coated or enteric coated vitamin pills	If it is a known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken as a nutritional supplement	Nifsal mei'achila	Questionable whether achshivei applies	Machlokes HaPoskim
Hard gelatin capsules	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Nifsal mei'achila	We do not say achshivei	Rav Belsky permits for Choleh. Rav Schachter even permits vitamins
Soft gelatin capsules	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Not nifsal mei'achila	Possibly made from edible pigskin	Choleh can wrap in tissue paper
Sugar coated pills	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Coating is not nifsal mei'achila	Possible issur – gelatin, triacetin polysorbates, (di)acetylated monoglyceride	Choleh can wrap in tissue paper
Liquid medicines (not cough medicine)	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Not nifsal mei'achila	Possible issur – glycerin, polysorbates, flavors	Choleh can dilute in water/juice (for amounts see above)
Infant drops	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Not nifsal mei'achila	Possible issur – glycerin, polysorbates	Can be diluted, or if manufacturer claims to use only vegetable ing.
Chewable tablets	known remedy or prescription and kosher is not available	Taken for medicinal purposes	Not nifsal mei'achila	Possible issur – gelatin, polysorbates, stearic acid, stearates, flavors, (lactose)	Choleh can wrap in tissue paper. If not possible, in case of great need, one can be lenient if manufacturer claims to uses only vegetable ingredients